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SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR NAVIGATING WITHIN A DISPLAY HAVING
DIFFERENT DISPLAY SECTIONS

Field of Invention

The present invention relates to a system and method of providing a user interface for allowing a computer user to navigate through a plurality of electronic information sources, and in particular to a user interface for navigating through information sources in an electronic on-line environment, such as the Internet, using a display comprising a plurality of separate sections.

10 Background

User interface for allowing a user to navigate through electronic information sources and on-line services are known in the art, i.e. web browsers for navigating through the Internet. In such a user interface, a user typically manipulates the position of a cursor on a display screen and selects icons or symbols displayed thereon to manipulate the displayed data or link to another information source, or web page.

To provide additional flexibility and ease for the user, a user interface may divide a single display into a plurality of independent frames wherein each frame is associated with a different information source. For Internet applications, each frame may be associated with a different data source. As such, a user may change the contents of a particular frame and link to other data sources from that frame independently of the other frames. Similarly, each section of a display or screen may correspond to a different web page, displaying different information from different web sites.

From a user interface perspective, the use of sections, for example, frames can be problematic. The user must be able to move the cursor from frame to frame. However, there is no embedded control allowing the cursor to jump from frame to frame. This is not

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an issue when a mouse, trackball or other similar devices are used, as such devices allow the user to move the cursor freely across frame borders.

However, a problem arises when the system does not include or
5 provide for such devices. For example, such a situation may arise in
an arrangement wherein a standard television is used for browsing
the Internet and the associated support system does not provide for a
cursor which can move freely across the display screen. In that case,
the user must use direction arrows and a selection button, or other
10 similar devices, on a remote control device in order to select icons or
symbols in a frame and move from frame to frame.

One solution to this problem is to provide a keyboard wherein a
particular keystroke combination moves the cursor between frames,
i.e. CTRL + arrow key. However, this requires the user to either
memorize a number of keystroke combinations, which the user may
find difficult to remember, or keep referring to instruction notes
during operation. Further, this solution cannot be used if the user
must rely entirely on a remote control device.

Another solution is to force the user to scroll through an entire
frame, i.e. to the top or bottom edges of the frame, in order to move to
the next frame. However, from a user's point of view, having to scroll
through an entire frame can quickly become tedious
and unacceptable. In addition, the contents of a frame may be lengthy
and the user may run out of patience from reaching the end of the
25 frame.

In another example, EP-A-0773-495, discloses a known user interface
system having a display with one or more display sections. In particular, one
of the display sections has a navigational symbol on a border of the display
section. However, the symbol is merely used to scroll the content of the
30 window up and down and not for other navigational purposes.

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The present invention involves a user interface that allows a user to quickly and easily navigate within and between a plurality of sections or frames on a single display screen. In one embodiment, a user selects a highlighted icon and/or button to manipulate the data in a particular frame or one of a plurality of control arrows shown on the borders between the frames to move from one frame to another.

5 A user controls the position of the highlight by pressing one of a plurality of direction buttons on a remote control device and selects an icon or a control arrow by pressing a selection button on the

10 remote control device.

Therefore, a system and a method for navigating within a display having one or more display sections are disclosed, the system comprising:

means for selecting a section of said display; and

15 control means, in response to said selection, for displaying a navigational symbol on a border of said selected section, said symbol corresponding to a direction in which a highlight may be moved.

In one embodiment of the invention, the control means, in response to a selection of said symbol on said border, moves said 20 highlight in said corresponding direction. In another embodiment, said symbol indicates an availability of an adjacent section in said corresponding direction.

The present invention may advantageously be used in arrangements wherein a standard home television is connected to the 25 Internet using appropriate support equipment but the system does not include or provide for a cursor which can freely move across the frames on the display screen.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

The invention will be described with reference to the accompanying drawings, wherein:

5 Figs. 1A - 1C are representations of a display screen having a plurality of sections, with a first section as being active.

Fig. 2 shows a display screen having a second area as being active.

10 Fig. 3 is a simplified block diagram of an apparatus for implementing the present user interface;

Figs. 4-8 are flow chart diagrams showing the steps taken by the present user interface; and

Fig. 9 is a top plan view of a remote control device suitable for use with the present user interface.

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DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

Referring to Figs. 1A - 1C, and Fig. 2, there are shown representations of display screen 10 divided into a plurality of sections or frames 15, 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20. Such a display is suitable for presenting information from a plurality of different information sources at one time. In Internet applications, each frame may be associated with different information and may be manipulated independently of the other frames. This type of display may be provided on a computer monitor or a standard television monitor using appropriate support equipment and software, including, but not limited to the N/C 100 system provided by Thomson Consumer Electronics, Inc. of Indianapolis, Indiana.

A simplified block diagram of a suitable apparatus for providing a display in accordance with the present invention is shown in Fig. 3. 30 Apparatus for electronically connecting a display terminal to various

electronic information sources are known in the art and will not be discussed in detail here. As shown in Fig. 3, the suitable apparatus 20 comprises a controller, CPU 26, which receives the commands from a user and performs the steps necessary to provide a display on television or computer display 34, as shown in Figs. 4-8, to be discussed below. Typically, user input is provided through a user entry device such as a remote control or keyboard 22 which sends a signal to IR signal decoder 24 operatively connected to CPU 26. CPU 26 is also connected to a network computer or other on line data sources through communications interface unit 29 to send and receive data therethrough. CPU 26 also accesses ROM 28 which stores the data for generating the display and highlighting graphic elements and RAM 32 which stores HTML page data received through interface unit 29. Upon receiving a user command, CPU 26 accesses the data in ROM 28 and RAM 32, and provides an output to video signal processor 30 which generates signals to control display 34. In a system which uses a standard television monitor, tuner 25 and IF processor 27 are also connected to video signal processor 30 to provide a baseband video signal representing the video portion of a tuned television signal.

In the present arrangement wherein a remote control device 22 is used to select the icons or the symbols on the display, highlighting methods are used to indicate to the user which icon or symbol is currently available for selection. An icon or a symbol may be highlighted by changing the appearance of the icon or the symbol, for example by changing the size and/or color of the icon or symbol. In our exemplary embodiment, as shown in Fig. 1A, for example, an icon 3 is shown as being highlighted by having a background box surrounding it. The highlighting may be thought of as a background cursor which can only move to certain locations on the display and changes the appearance of the icon or symbol over which it is placed.

Upon highlighting the desired icon or symbol, the user can select the highlighted icon or symbol using the appropriate select button on the remote control device in order to change the display in some manner. Thus, the present invention allows a user to easily and quickly navigate within and between the various frames by moving the position of a highlight and selecting the highlighted icon or symbol using a remote control device.

A suitable user entry or a remote control device 5 is shown in Fig. 9. As shown in Fig. 9, remote control device 5 includes direction buttons 6, 7, 8, 9, which correspond to up, down, left and right directions, respectively, for moving the position of the highlight. For example, pressing up button 6 will cause the icon or symbol nearest and above the currently highlighted icon or symbol to become highlighted indicating that it is now available for selection. Remote control device 5 also includes OK button 6a for selecting the highlighted icon or symbol. Suitable remote control devices include, but are not limited to, CRK93H1 manufactured by Thomson Consumer Electronics, Inc. of Indianapolis, Indiana and adapted for use with the N/C 100 system. Therefore, using remote control device 5 in the manner described above, a user can easily and quickly move the highlighting within a frame and select the highlighted icons as desired thereby easily navigating within a particular frame.

For example, as shown in Fig. 1A, an icon 3 is initially highlighted as shown by a background box surrounding the icon. An icon may be a symbol or text string which has a related HTML link or the like. Since the highlighted icon 3 is in section 15, section 15 is the active area in which a user can move from one icon to another using the direction buttons 6, 7, 8, 9 on the user entry control 5. For example, if icon 3 is currently being highlighted as shown in Fig. 1A,

and a user pushes the down button 7 on the remote control, icon 4 will become highlighted as shown in Fig. 1B.

Navigation between frames is now discussed. In Figs. 1A and 1B, frame 15 is active (i.e., selected) and the remaining frames are 5 inactive, as discussed above. That is, the user can manipulate the information provided to frame 15 by using remote control device 5 to select the icons within frame 15. The user may select which frame is active using remote control device 5 to highlight and select navigation controls in the form of, for example, control arrow symbols 12 and 13 10 shown in the frame borders 15r and 15b as described further below.

In the present user interface, navigation controls are embedded 15 into borders surrounding an active frame such that a user can navigate between the frames using arrow buttons 6-9 and "OK" button 6a on remote control device 5. For example, directional symbols 12 and 13 appear as arrows in the borders 15r and 15b between frames 15 and 17 and 15 and 16, respectively, and may be highlighted and selected in the same manner as the icons. In other words, the highlight is moved between the icons and the arrows using 20 direction buttons 6-9 and the icons and arrows may be selected using OK button 6a.

Highlighting and selecting a control arrow (e.g., 12 or 13) on the border will also cause the user interface to scroll the contents of the frame in the direction of the arrow. However, if the control arrow is selected after the frame contents have reached the edge of the 25 respective border in the direction of the arrow, the user interface will switch the highlight to the nearest icon or symbol inside the next frame to which the arrow is pointing. In this manner, the adjacent frame becomes active. For example, in Fig. 1A, when arrow 12 is highlighted after the contents of frame 15 have been scrolled to the 30 rightmost edge and the user presses OK button 6a, frame 17 becomes

active and frame 15 becomes inactive. Similarly, when arrow 13 is highlighted after the contents of frame 15 have been scrolled to the bottom edge and OK button 6a is pressed, frame 16 becomes active and frame 15 becomes inactive as shown in Fig. 2. Once a new frame 5 16 becomes active, arrows 13a and 14a appear on the borders around the newly activated frame 16 to allow the user to select and activate frames adjacent the newly activated frame 16 as desired.

The steps for navigating between the frames and the links within the frames are illustrated in Figs. 4-8. The steps indicated in 10 Figs. 4-8 may be implemented using a software routine that, when executed by CPU 26 in Fig. 3, controls the system shown in Fig. 3 to provide the described features. As shown in Fig. 4, the user interface initially draws the frames and shows the control arrows which may be selected. First, the HTML page is loaded in step 40. If the HTML 15 page uses frames and the frames use borders as indicated in steps 42 and 44, the user interface select or gives focus to the frame containing the default link in step 46 then draws the frame borders and frame controls. As indicated in steps 46-50, 52-56, 58-62, and 64-68, the user interface draws a control arrow on the borders which are 20 adjacent to another frame. For example, in Fig. 1, control arrows 12 and 13 are drawn on the right and bottom border portions 15r and 15b, respectively. After drawing the frame borders and frame controls, the user interface waits for and responds to user input as indicated in step 70.

25 Figs. 5-8, indicate the steps taken when the user presses the up, down, right and down direction buttons 6-9, respectively, on remote control device 5. As the steps in each of Figs. 5-8 are similar, only Fig. 6 will be discussed in detail. However, it is to be understood that the discussion below is applicable to the remaining figures.

- As discussed above, Fig. 1A shows area 15 has been selected to be an active area. When a user then presses down button 7 in step 90 of Fig. 6, the user interface first decides whether the highlight is on a link or on a control arrow as indicated in step 92. If the
5 highlight is on a link, such as icon 3 as shown in Fig. 1A, the user interface must decide whether there is a visible link below the active link 3 inside the active frame 15 as indicated in step 94. If there is a visible link 4, the user interface moves the focus to the link below the active link and highlights that link 4 in step 96, as shown in Fig. 1B.
10 If there is no visible link, the user interface moves the highlight to the control arrow 13 shown in the bottom border 15b and goes back to step 98 to await further user input, as shown in Fig. 1C.
- If the highlight is on a control arrow as indicated in step 92, the user interface decides in step 92 whether the frame contents continue
15 beyond the bottom border 15b of the frame 15. If the contents continue but are currently hidden from view of a user, the user interface scrolls the frame to display the contents below the bottom border 15b as indicated in step 109 and then waits for further user input when the down button 7 is released. If the frame contents do
20 not continue, the user interface moves the highlight to the next default, i.e. closest, icon or symbol (link) in frame 16 below the bottom border as indicated in step 102 and as shown in Fig. 2. In this manner, the user can move to a new frame when the contents of frame 15 have been scrolled to an edge. As described above, a user
25 can easily and quickly navigate within and between the frames using the direction and selection buttons on remote control device 5. It is to be understood that the present method may be implemented using a number of techniques and/or programming languages known to one of ordinary skill in the art, including, but not limited to visual BASIC,
30 C++ and JAVA.

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It will be apparent to those skilled in the art that although the invention has been described in terms of a specific example, modifications and changes may be made to the disclosed embodiment without departing from the essence of the invention. Therefore, it is
5 to be understood that the present invention is intended to cover all modifications which naturally flow from the foregoing example.

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SUMMARY OF INVENTION

Therefore, what is needed is a user interface which allows a user to quickly and easily navigate within and between a plurality of sections on a single display screen, using a remote control device.